

3
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Vietnam Aide Says Politics Came Up at Talks on Enemy Strength

By M. A. FARBER

Under relentless cross-examination, a witness for Gen. William C. Westmoreland in his libel suit against CBS testified yesterday that political and public relations concerns had been injected into a high-level 1967 discussion on enemy troop strength in South Vietnam.

But the witness, Brig. Gen. George A. Godding, denied that these concerns had influenced his presentation of figures on enemy troop strength as General Westmoreland's chief delegate to a conference that year at Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley, Va.

David Boies, the CBS attorney — drenched with sweat as he pressed his interrogation — elicited further acknowledgements from General Godding:

That contrary to General Westmoreland's decision, he believed that Vietcong self-defense and secret self-defense forces should have been counted and their numbers made known to American troops.

That while those forces were no longer counted "when they were alive," they were sometimes numbered among enemy casualties, thus reducing the size of the enemy in official statistics.

That wide distribution was given a 1967 report that said the enemy was losing more forces than it could replace.

Rapid Cross-Examination

Typical of Mr. Boies's rapid-fire cross-examination, which was tougher than at any time previously during the trial, was an exchange that followed General Godding's admission that he did not know how many of the enemy's self-defense and secret self-defense forces were armed.

Q. Do you know approximately?

A. Ten percent.

Q. Is that based on any study, sir?

A. No.

Q. Have you talked to anyone who told you that it was 10 percent?

A. No. But, basically, very few of the old women and children [in those forces] were armed.

Q. How do you know that?

A. That is based on my experience in World War II in Europe.

Q. Was World War II a guerrilla conflict?

General Godding, who was director of intelligence production in Vietnam for seven months in 1967, likened the Vietcong self-defense forces to elements of the German home guard.

'Made Aware' of Concerns

On the stand in Federal District Court in Manhattan, General Godding testified that political concerns should not have been an element of official discussions of the size and capabilities of the enemy. But he said that while serving at General Westmoreland's chief delegate to the August 1967 conference at the C.I.A. headquarters in Virginia, he was "made aware" of those concerns by his superiors.

The 1982 CBS Reports documentary that led to General Westmoreland's \$120 million libel suit maintained that the military command in Saigon had imposed an arbitrary ceiling of 300,000 on enemy strength in 1967 to give the appearance that the United States was winning the war.

Between May and August 1967, the official military listing known as the order of battle carried enemy strength at a total of 297,000: 120,400 regular North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops; 24,800 administrative personnel; 39,000 political cadre, and 112,800 irregulars — including about 70,000 self-defense and secret self-defense forces who planted mines, set booby traps and served as "fifth columnists."

In May, however, General Westmoreland's chief of intelligence, Maj. Gen. Joseph A. McChristian, had concluded that the political cadre, the guerrillas and the self-defense and secret self-defense forces had been heavily underestimated. The self-defense and secret self-defense forces alone, he said before his departure from Vietnam in June 1967, were in the neighborhood of 117,000.

Around this time, the C.I.A. decided to prepare for President Johnson a spe-

cial national intelligence estimate on enemy strength, which would also affect the figure in the order of battle. And the August meeting attended by General Godding was intended to set a figure on which the C.I.A., General Westmoreland's command, and other intelligence agencies could agree.

But a dispute arose because General Westmoreland wanted to eliminate from the order of battle a figure for self-defense and secret self-defense forces — he said they lacked offensive combat capability — and some C.I.A. officials wanted to include an even higher figure for them than General McChristian had arrived at. Moreover, the C.I.A. wanted to include in the total as many as 90,000 political cadre, while General Westmoreland wanted that category enumerated but not continued as part of the order of battle total.

At the Langley conference, which did not resolve the dispute, the total advanced by General Godding was 298,000, perhaps 200,000 less than the total sought then by the C.I.A.

Last Thursday, on his direct testimony, General Godding said he had taken the military's "best estimates" to the conference. And he adhered to that position yesterday.

Showed Deposition

But Mr. Boies showed him a deposition he made last year in which he said he was unaware before the Langley conference of a dispute over the figure

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2.

to be included in the order of battle and the estimate for the President. At another point in his deposition, General Godding said that no one had told him of "political or public relations aspects" surrounding the figure either before, during, or after the Langley meeting.

General Godding, who completed his testimony yesterday and will be followed by Everett S. Parkins, a former military intelligence officer in Vietnam, said he had been mistaken in the deposition.

The general now said he had received no "political or presentational restrictions or guidance" from General Westmoreland or anyone else before the meeting. But once he was at Langley, Gen. Phillip B. Davidson Jr., who had succeeded General McChristian as chief of intelligence, had alerted him to such concerns. General Davidson, he said, had also vetoed his request that the military negotiate a range for enemy strength rather than a single figure.

General Godding acknowledged that General Davidson had sent him a cable at Langley saying that a figure of 420,000, including the self-defense and secret self-defense forces, had "surfaced" in Saigon and "stunned the Embassy and this headquarters" and was completely "unacceptable." The cable said the military would "not accept" a total in excess of the one then "carried by the press" — 297,000.

Mr. Boies closed in on the witness, his voice rising.

Q. Did you understand that it was your obligation and the obligation of others to come up with your best estimate?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you understand that it was your obligation and the obligation of others to come up with your best estimate unaffected by political or public relations concerns?

A. That's correct.

Mr. Boies then showed General Godding a July 1967 cable from George A. Carver, the chief of Vietnamese affairs for the C.I.A., to Richard Helms, the director of Central Intelligence.

In the newly declassified cable, which concerned a possible accord on an enemy strength figure, Mr. Carver said General Davidson's "chief problem was political and presentational one of coming out with brand new set of figures showing much larger Communist force at time when press knew" that General Westmoreland was seeking more troops.

"You see that?" Mr. Boies said.

"I do," said General Godding, still insisting that, whatever had passed between General Davidson and Mr. Carver, he was unaware of it before August.

On redirect examination, General Godding said that General Westmoreland had never instructed him to consider political concerns in determining intelligence estimates.

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